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Our Prospects and Duties.

A

SERMON ON THE WAR,

PREACHED AT

PATERSON, N. J.,

ON

SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 28th, 1861.

BY

F. E. BUTLER.

PATERSON :

PRINTED BY VAN DERHOVEN & IRISH,
GUARDIAN OFFICE,

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THE
West. Ind. Mus. Soc.

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S E R M O N .

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage.”—
JOSHUA 1: 9.

Few men have been called to a more difficult and delicate and dangerous duty than was the man to whom Jehovah addressed these words.

Moses was dead, Moses, the learned, the wise, the experienced, the honored, the godly Moses was no more. For forty years he had been, the spiritual and political leader of the people. He had emancipated a nation, he had framed a code of laws, he had spoken face to face with God, he had revealed God's will to the people, his hand had brought water from the rock, his word had brought bread from heaven, his prayers had turned to flight the armies of the aliens, and averted the judgments of God from the people. Honored of God and revered by men beyond any other, in the full possession of his faculties, he “fell on sleep,” and a nation wept his loss.

At this critical moment, Joshua was summoned to take his place. Joshua was not without qualification for the office, he was not without experience as a military commander; but his position was exceedingly responsible and trying. He was to fill the office occupied by Moses. That thought was enough to crush him. He was to lead the nation on a new and different career from that hitherto pursued. Under Moses they had encountered enemies on the march, and conquered them. But now they were to engage in the deliberate purpose of searching out their enemies and subduing them wherever found. They were to divide the land and take it. A period of war and conquest lay before them. Theirs was a severe and an arduous service. The enemies they were to contend with, were brave, and warlike, and of gigantic stature; they had great numbers and vast resources; their armies were well disciplined and well appointed; they were entrenched in strong fortresses, and secured within “cities great and walled up to heaven;” they were a desperate and wicked people; and they were to fight for their country, for their homes, and for their lives. The contest therefore in all human probability would be long and arduous.

Israel had now reached the river which formed the natural boundary of the promised land, and the next step was to cross it and enter upon their difficult and perilous duty. Well might Joshua and the people pause before they took that irrevocable step. Well might they dread to begin a struggle so mighty, so momentous. What courage was now demanded of them, what fortitude, what discretion, what prudence, what heroism, what fidelity and what divine wisdom ! How much he and they needed divine guidance and assurance. How timely then, and how welcome, the word of Jehovah, " As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee ; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee ; be strong and of a good courage ; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I swore unto their fathers to give them."

The situation of the Government and the loyal people of these United States to-day, is not very unlike that of Joshua and Israel when these words were spoken.

The Government and the loyal people of this country, stand to-day armed and ready to march forth to a mighty struggle. From the Penobscot to the Mississippi, from the Ohio to the St. Lawrence, the air resounds with the din of preparation and the tread of armed men. The peaceful pursuits of commerce and agriculture give way to those of war. Men are beating their ploughshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears. The national ensign, however it may trail dishonored in the dust elsewhere, here at the north floats not only from the frowning battlements of forts and arsenals, but from the halls of justice and legislation, from schoolhouse and warehouse and workshop, from the stately mansion of the rich and the humble cottage of the poor, over the crowded marts of trade, from the green hill top, and even from the house of God. In every grade of society, husbands, fathers and brothers, are breaking away from those whom they love more than life, to peril their lives on the high places of the field. One unanimous sentiment pervades the whole—the defense and support of that Government which God gave our fathers, and under which by his grace we will live, or with which we will fall.

In one respect our position is entirely unlike that of Joshua and Israel. They were going forth to destroy the lives and appropriate to themselves the country of their enemies. Our errand is very different. We go to vindicate the majesty of the law ; to defend the Constitutional liberties of the nation ; to teach traitors that the proper means of redressing grievances in a free country, is not the bayonet, but the ballot-box ; to restore to all men, in all parts of the land the right to speak their sentiments without being mobbed and murdered, and to *secure* to all men in all parts of the country the inestimable privileges which our

fathers bought at so dear a cost. This is the design of the Government ; this is the design of the people. To achieve this men have thrown aside party and prejudice ; they have rallied shoulder to shoulder under one flag ; they have offered their treasure and themselves. With one accord, men of all shades of political opinion have pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to the holy cause of liberty and union. What a sublime spectacle ! The sight of it is enough to compensate for all we have hitherto sacrificed and suffered. The issue will repay a thousand fold all we shall yet sacrifice and suffer. I seem to hear the words that inspired the heart of Israel and their leader on the banks of the Jordan sounding in the ears of every loyal citizen of this nation :—"As I was with thy fathers when they toiled and bled to lay the foundation of this republic, so will I be with thee in defending and maintaining it. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Have not I commanded thee ? Be strong and of a good courage. Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed ; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

On last Sunday evening, I called your attention to the DUTY OF SUSTAINING THE GOVERNMENT in this emergency, and of prayer for our rulers. I propose now to point out some of the REASONS which should ENCOURAGE and nerve us in this GREAT CRISIS of our country's history and also to CORRECT some ERRORS into which we are liable at such a time to fall.

The first thing I name as an encouragement, in entering upon this contest is the rectitude of our cause. We do not engage in this war willingly ; it is thrust upon us. We prefer peace, but those who oppose us will have no peace. Their voice is still for war. We do not fight for glory, for conquest, for plunder. We contend for liberty, for law, for constitutional government and equal rights. We do not maintain a great wrong like slavery as they do, and demand the right to perpetuate and to spread it. We would prefer to see slavery confined, restrained and gradually removed, as being best for both master and slave, but we do not fight even for that ; though that may be the issue. We ask only to maintain the Constitution and the Union which our fathers established. And who will say that this is an unreasonable demand ? We should be the veriest slaves on earth if we would take up with anything short of this. The world would hoot at us and posterity would curse us if we did not maintain this.

Our duty then is plain, our cause is just, and the rectitude of our cause should nerve us to the contest. The right must prevail ; but if it does not, it is bound to be maintained. We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our brethren at the South, we owe it to the world, we owe it to gen-

erations yet unborn, we owe it to God. Be strong therefore and of a good courage; our cause is just. This should nerve us though we were few and feeble and divided; but we are not few, we are not feeble, we are not divided.

And this suggests the second encouragement, viz: our position. I will not disguise the full force and power of the rebels. They, many of them at least, are brave, determined and sincere. Their leader is a man of military education, skill and experience, he is active, resolute and of tried courage. They have numbers enough to form a large army. They have men of great ability. Their first statesman has been the acknowledged leader of the House of Representatives at Washington. Their troops will be commanded by officers who have served long and bravely under the Federal flag. They have laid their plans deep and matured them well. They have staked the issue upon a desperate struggle and are prepared to meet it. They are flushed with the success of their first enterprise and confident of a final triumph. But with all this, the odds against them is tremendous. From the very first their leaders have persuaded the people of the South that when the first gun was fired, unnumbered regiments at the North would start to their feet and move off to join them. But they were reckoning with out their host. The great party which, in political matters, had so often acted with the South they believed would still sustain them in a mass. But when the first shot struck Sumter and resounded through the North, the great Democratic party with Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Douglas at their head wheeled with Mr. Everett and all other parties into line and presented one unbroken front against the common foe. And from the mountains of Aroostook to the prairies of Kansas, men sprang to arms and one responsive shout went up, the Union, the Government, they must, they shall be preserved! Already this magnificent display of Northern loyalty has astounded the rebels. The first notes of their disappointment and chagrin have reached us, and give token of coming triumph. This wonderful and I cannot but think, (*they* cannot but think) this God-sent unanimity of the North is one of the greatest sources of strength and encouragement.

Again, in the civil wars of England, the situation of the contending parties was far worse than it is among us. There, men of opposite parties were often found living side by side in the same village, and even at the same fireside. No man knew when he was safe. No man knew whom he could trust. But here by the good providence of God the contending parties of loyal men and traitors are separated by a *well defined geographical line*. And the inestimable sense of security which such a broad line of demarcation affords, we at the North at least,

are permitted to enjoy. The loyal men at the South indeed, are for the present denied this advantage, and they must wait. But to us this advantage is immediate and beyond all price.

Add to this, we at the North are contending not for a chimera of the imagination, not for some wild abstraction that can never be realized; we fight for the established and legitimate government; for a constitution that has been long tried and approved. If there be such a thing as a divine right in government it is on our side, and this fact is a huge advantage. We struggle for rulers who, by the voice of a free people, are administering laws by the ordinance of God, and "The King's name is a tower of strength!"

Besides look at the relative numbers and resources of the two parties. The North has nineteen millions of freemen—with no incumbrances. The South, counting all the loyal men with the traitors, has but eight millions hampered, to say the least, with half that number of slaves. Were all the border states to side with those which have seceded, a thing by no means probable as matters look now; were the South to stand up for treason with the same unanimity that the North stands up for law and could they persuade their slaves to remain, quietly at home while they are trying to subvert the government, even then they could brave the field with but little over one million of men to meet three millions from the North.

The South may have more ardor than the North, though I doubt it, but they have less power of endurance.

Besides, though they had as many men and as good a cause as we they lack the sinews of war. They have not arms to equip a large army, nor the means to make nor the credit to buy them. The means of subsistence, too, is limited. Cotton always encroaches on corn at the South, and the last corn crop there was unusually short. On the other hand we at the North, though at present not fully supplied with the munitions of war, have the skill and the means to make them and ready access to foreign markets to buy and plenty of money to buy with. The credit of the Federal government is perfect. The bank vaults of the North are filled with bullion, and the patriotism of the people is pouring its treasure at the feet of the rulers only less lavishly than the country is sending its sons to the field. Meantime in the great North-west the grain is so abundant that it is absolutely used for fuel, and the ordinary means of transport cannot get the old crop to market before another crop will be raised. Everything that goes to equip and sustain a large military force, we have, in overflowing abundance.

Not two weeks have passed since the call of the President for troops, and already a formidable force is assembled for the defense of the Cap-

ital, and more than the seventy-five thousand men, it is believed, have volunteered, and are ready to be mustered into service. Indeed, it is said that Ohio alone is ready with that number. While this is going on by land, a like activity is soon to be displayed on the sea. The Government possesses a small but gallant Navy, and ample means to extend it. The South has not a vessel of war, and is not very likely to have. They are not a commercial people, but the little commerce they do will be stopped. Here lies a strong arm of the Government. Their ports will be blockaded, their supplies from the North and from foreign ports will be cut off. Their sources of revenue will be dried up, and the sinews of their strength will be cut. Thus, while a formidable army sweeps down upon them from the North and shuts them up on the South, crippled, and hemmed in, it may be that a comparatively bloodless victory will be achieved.

It is not improbable that the loyal men there will then dare to speak for themselves and assert sentiments which, at present, it would be death to avow. Already such a reaction has begun, wherever the power of the Government has been exhibited. These things should cheer and nerve us. They should make us strong and of a good courage. For now the whole civilized world looks on with breathless interest. Their hopes and sympathies are with us. The prayers of good men in all the world fight on the side of liberty and law. Comparing thus our cause with that of the traitors, and our numbers and resources with theirs, ought we not to thank God and take courage? "With might and right both on our side, who can doubt which side will win."

But I should omit the greatest encouragement of all, if I failed to mention the Providence of God. For one, I cannot believe that God intends to wipe out a nation that has so many elements of strength in it as this. I cannot believe that he will overturn at the end of seventy years, a fabric which he spent two hundred years to construct. Such a course is in the face of all his dealings. The life of a great nation must not be measured by the same standard with which we measure the life of a man. I cannot believe that God will pluck up that tree for which he shook and "sifted four kingdoms to find the seed;" which he planted with such care; which he has watered and cherished so lovingly; which has already born such fair and abundant fruit; which is still strong and green and beautiful with youth. I do not so read the lessons of his Providence. He may dig about it, he may shake it; he may purge and he may prune it; I hope he will; but I cannot believe that he will pluck it up, or cut it down. I think I hear his majestic voice saying unto the American people, in some wise, as he said to Joshua and Israel, "From the mountains of Maine even unto the great

river, the river Mississippi, all the land of the North and the South, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your coast." I believe that the promises virtually made to our fathers will be fulfilled to us their sons. The world, and the cause of Christ and humanity have too many interests bound up here for God to permit the downfall of this nation. Let us then be strong and of a good courage, and God will give us the victory.

And this leads me in the second place to notice briefly the feelings with which we should enter on this mighty struggle.

Towards the people of the South let us cherish no rancor, let there be no malice, and no revenge. They are wrong, but many of them are sincere. While we go forth to correct and enlighten them, let us do it as the ministers of justice and the servants of the Constitution, with no passion, no animosity. Let there be no unholy triumph, but a serious, humble temper, joined with manly bearing and courageous action.

Towards each other, let us deport ourselves with great prudence, affection and magnanimity. Let former alienations be swallowed up in a common love of country; let no party differences be revived; let no former opinions be called in review; let there be no criminations and re-criminations. But let us hold one another to be, what indeed we are, brethren, embarked in a common cause, seeking a common object, and bound to a common destiny. The brave and the strong can afford to be generous.

To our rulers and especially to the Federal Government we owe *peculiar* service at this time. They hold a position, whose responsibility and burden we cannot estimate. The administration of the affairs of so vast a country as this, is a crushing weight, even in time of peace. What must it be to manage the complicated machinery of this Government now, in this time of civil war! What principles shall guide the leaders? What precedents shall they appeal to? They need the full force and sympathy and power of the people to sustain them, and thanks be to God they have them. Up to their highest hope and beyond it, the people have responded with men and money and prayer to the call of the Government. But I have observed with pain a disposition on the part of some persons and some papers to find fault with the apparent inaction of the Government. It was felt that the Government was not sufficiently alive to the importance of protecting the Capital. Doubts began to be expressed of the ability and of the disposition of the Government to carry out the wishes of the people. It was feared that the Administration and the Commander-in-Chief were disposed to compromise or at least to temporize with the rebels. This feeling is natural, but a little reflection teaches that it is not reasonable. We

should remember that the Government must look after the whole country. They must not only protect Washington, but attend to Fort Pickens, and look after Gosport, and the arsenal at St. Louis. They must care for the troops at Cairo as well as those at Baltimore and Annapolis. Their plans are broad and deep, and concealed not only from the rebels, but even from their friends. Now then, we must learn to trust the Government. We have placed them in office, and there is no reason to doubt their fidelity or their ability. We must not expect, either now or hereafter, to see everything done *as we wish* or *when we wish*. There is such a thing as strategy in war. A good general sometimes provokes defeat sometimes invites it, and sometimes defeats are victories. We must not, then, be despondent at occasional slight reverses, nor impatient of delay. Fabius and Washington did the business for the enemy by a masterly inactivity. Be not in haste for the decisive engagement. The skill of our Commander-in-Chief knows best when, and where and how to strike. Trust then, the Government : be strong and of a good courage. Say to the President as the people said to Joshua, "All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us we will go. Only the Lord our God be with thee."

Finally and chiefly, let us put our trust in God. Without his blessing fleets and armies advance in vain. Napoleon the Great said that "Providence is on the side that has the heaviest artillery." But he lived to learn that Providence when he so pleases, can shift the artillery, or do without it. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." Some trust in chariots and some in horses : but let us trust in the Lord our God : and while we

"Put our fortune to the arbitrament
Of bloody strokes, and mortal-staring war,"

let us not go forth as the unthinking "horse rasheth into the battle : " but let us go with reverence and with prayer. When one of the Massachusetts regiments was marching through Fifth avenue in the city of New York, to the defense of Washington, a gentleman offered one of the soldiers a bottle. "What's that ?" asked the soldier. "Brandy," said the other, "to keep up your spirits." The Massachusetts man reverently drew a Bible from his pocket and holding it up replied, "that's what keeps my spirits up !" Let us go forth sustained by a like heroic faith in God, with patience for any trial, with a cheerful surrender of whatever our country calls for, whether it be us or *ours*. Let us not seek our own, but each other's good. Let us live, or if need be, die, for liberty and humanity, for posterity and for God. Let us who are christians, burnish up anew our spiritual armor, more needed now than ever, and those who are not christians, I beseech you, make peace with

God through Jesus Christ before you make war on traitors. Let us all be men and women of prayer. This will inspire us with both courage and strength; and let us hope and pray that this mighty struggle

“Of sharp war,
Shall reap the harvest of perpetual peace.”

That it shall speed the coming of that kingdom under whose mild sway, the sound of war shall be heard no more; where there shall be nothing to hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain; when

—“The human mind redeemed from error,
There'll be no need for arsenals and forts.”

When “the voice of Christ” shall whisper “Peace!”

“Peace! and no longer from its brazen portals
The blast of War's great organ shakes the skies,
But beautiful as songs of the immortals,
The holy melodies of love arise.”

God speed that day. Till then, let us be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

It is well known to most of you that the Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, being the Chaplain of the Passaic Brigade, has publicly announced his intention to serve in that capacity, if the way be open and his people interpose no serious objections. Before his determination was made public, I said to him, “You are the Pastor of a church; you are the father of a family, and you are not at present, an able-bodied man. For these reasons I wish you to tell your people that I, who labor under no one of these disabilities, will cheerfully go in your place.” This he declined to do. Subsequently I urged the matter further; but finding him deaf to my persuasions, I, without his knowledge, addressed a letter to the commanding officer of the Brigade, tendering my services as Chaplain of the Regiment now forming in this section of the State in response to the President's proclamation. In the letter I stated the reasons why my claim should take precedence of that of my brother-in-law. To this letter I have received no definite or final answer; but should my services be accepted, I am ready by divine permission to go. I do not go because I love war. I hate it. But I shall go, if I go at all, from a firm conviction of duty and a natural love of country. I shall go to share in the fatigues, the exposures, and the perils of the campaign; to encourage my countrymen in the struggle; to minister to their spiritual and temporal welfare. I shall be sorry to part with the congregation to whom it has been my pleasure

thus far to minister; but I shall go with the hope of returning again (if such should be your wish) to resume these duties when peace shall have been restored. Or, if to return be denied, then to give my life to the noblest cause in the world, the cause of God, of liberty, and my country. May He who guides all, direct the issue and crown the struggle with glory and victory and peace, and to Him shall be the praise and honor forever. Amen.



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